

# DOGTOWN COMMON



PERCY MACKAYE

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THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.  
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BY  
PERCY MACKAYE

New York  
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
1921

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Set up and printed. Published May, 1921.

Press of  
J. J. Little & Ives Company  
New York, U. S. A.

## DOGTOWN COMMON



## I

Inland among the lonely cedar dells  
Of old Cape Ann, near Gloucester by the sea,  
Still live the dead—in homes that used to be.

    All day in dreamy spells  
They tattle low with tongues of tinkling cattle  
    bells,  
Or spirit tappings of some hollow tree,  
And there, all night—all night, out of the  
    dark—

    They bark—and bark.

No highroad winds by that deserted way;  
But on a dingy map in the town hall  
At Gloucester, one may read upon the wall:  
    "Old road from Sandy Bay  
Up through the woods to 'Squam the meeting-  
    house."—Today  
That horse-road is a rabbit-track, so small  
The ghost of Sabbath pilgrim there would fail  
    His ancient trail.

Yet often a footloose pilgrim by that track  
Still climbs the cape through bog and tangled  
    vine  
Up granite boulders, where by some green pine  
    He pauses and looks back  
Toward the blue summer sea where gull-white  
    schooners tack,  
And snuffs keen smells of berry-bush and brine  
On the warm wind, and harkens the noon-weary  
    Chime of the veery.



From Pigeon Cove three miles back in the wood  
The boulders heap up in a wild moraine—  
Gray ruined tabernacles of the rain  
    And starry solitude:  
A Stonehenge of the storms that Druid glaciers  
    hewed  
In supplication to the primal pain,  
While yet the world groaned in the mortal  
    throes  
    From which man rose.

There lie the lonely commons of the dead—  
The houseless homes of Dogtown. Still their  
    souls  
Tenant the bleak doorstones and cellar holes  
    Where once their quick loins bred  
Strong fisher men who fought with storms at  
    the masthead,  
And women folk who took their bitter toll  
Of death, with only their old dogs to be  
    A memory.

They took that bitter toll, and bitter thought  
Cankered their mateless hours. Dark phan-  
tasies,  
Hatched of long-brooding winter silences,  
Stretched their starved spirits taut  
With mystic yearnings toward forbidden sins,  
which wrought  
Their ban from holy communion. One of these,  
Last of the witches, pinched with spirit-hunger,  
Was Tammy Younger.

Long after Salem days she cherished the lore  
Old Cotton Mather cursed. She knew the clink  
Of sieve and shears, and how to brew dire drink  
Of foxberry leaves with gore  
Of new-stuck swine. Full many a godless  
grudge she bore  
To make in church a deacon gape or blink,  
While she at home would scratch his puppet  
with bristles  
Of prickly thistles.

And when she died, late in that stormy night  
 While neighbor Hodgkins labored in his kitchen  
 Matching the coffin boards to bury the witch in,  
     And rubbed the walnut bright  
 With beeswax, sudden it thundered, and the  
     candlelight  
 Guttered in dark, and "Wife, come here! It's  
     twitchin',"   
 He called. "I won't!" his goody shrieked, all  
     clammy;  
     "It's *her*—it's Tammy!"

So where the "Parting Path" splits at Whale's  
     Jaw  
 The berry-pickers pass her hearth and tell  
 Old yarns of Tam the Witch, and what befell  
     Of weird ordeal and awe  
 Young Judy Rhines, her niece, whose lips no  
     wildrose haw  
 Could match for redness, till they quivered pale  
 As leaf-ash when John Wharf, the minister,  
     First looked at her.

## II

That was the night, long after sun had set,  
When Peter Bray and Stephen Lurvey started  
With seven girls to find where the path parted.

Two miles from where they met,  
Dark Tucker, Poll and Nabby Morgan were  
game yet,

Lyd Muzzy, Peg and Liz, too, were stout-  
hearted,

But Molly Millet heard a barking sound—  
And turned bang-round.

"Here, Moll, come back! Your lantern's  
smokin' out.

The moon ain't ris' yet. Whar you goin'?"

"Home."

"What for? What ails ye?" "Nothin' don't."

"Oh, come! No time to turn about

Now; now we're nigh-most thar. Hark yonder."

"Hush! Don't shout;

You needn't shout." "She's scart," laughed

Nabby. "No'm,

I ain't." "What of? That's jest the widders'

bitches,

The Dogtown witches."

"Witches!" screamed Moll, and out her lantern  
went.

Peter haw-hawed his heartful; Peggy giggled.

Moll slipped a foot: down in the dark she  
wriggled,

Still bawling. Stephen lent

His light to Lyddy: "Here, Lyd,—hold it!"

Over he bent

And picked Moll up, all mud. "I never  
sniggled  
An eel as slick as you, Moll." Moll drew tight.  
She tugged the light

From Lyddy's hand. "I'm goin' home, you—  
you—!  
I'm goin' now, and I'll tell Master Wharf  
The Godless way *you're* goin'." "You're clean  
off,  
Moll. Whar we're goin' to  
Is old Aunt Tammy's, to see Judy." "Judy who?  
Your Judy Rhines! I guess folks know what  
trough  
She feeds outen—the slut!" "Stop thar!" rang  
Peter;  
"Wait till you meet 'er

Afore ye stuff your mouth with that mistake."  
"I wouldn't meet no one that daresn't stand  
In the Lord's meetin' house. I'd cut my hand

Right off, ruther than shake  
A finger of her." "Molly Millet, for good sake,"  
Cried Lyddy, "quit, and come. Pete says it's  
grand.

She'll tell our fortunes." "Peter's—sure! How  
sweet!"

"Watch here!" growled Pete,

"You knew first-off whar we was aimin' for;  
And what's a spookin'-party without spooks  
And gals and sparkin'. As for Judy—"  
"Zooks!"

Snapped Peg, "Moll's fearful sore  
Jest 'cause we snickered." "She don't need to  
set no store  
By snickers, doos she? Jedgin', though, by 'er  
looks,  
She's goin' back." "I be!" "Haw! Be ye so?  
Wall, go, then, go!

"Go tattle! Take Steve's lantern for your  
moon

And serenade your minister." "I will."  
And Molly went.—Far sounding from Fox Hill  
Still rose the barking croon  
Of Dogtown.—Stephen spat, and whistled a  
hymn tune;  
The girls drew close, like pigeons bill to bill  
In a seed-loft; but Peter, chewing wrath,  
Turned up the path.

He swung their only lantern on its pole.  
"Come on!" he called. The lantern hardly lit  
A yard around him with a circling slit  
Of light like a hearth coal,  
But through the iron-peakèd top a triple hole  
Gleamed with three goblin eyes, that winked  
a fit  
Of wabby spangles when his pole went teeter.  
"Come on!" called Peter,

And strode ahead. He was a brawny seaman,  
Was Peter Bray, and lusty in his pranks.



He fed a wild-oats stallion in his shanks,  
 And when he played the freeman  
 With girls ashore, and looked at Steve, and said  
 "Let be, man!"  
 Stephen *let be*; for Pete had stormed it on "the  
 Banks,"  
 And Steve knew well there was no longshore  
 huffer  
 Dared call Pete bluffer.

So, like a covey of pullets when Sir Cock,  
 High treading air, clucks in his gizzard, all  
 The girls came tiptoe-scrambling to the call  
 Of Peter—full in flock  
 With Stephen for their bantam. Over ridge,  
 up rock,  
 By pitch-dark woodland and dim pasture wall,  
 They followed his goblin light and the far  
 belling  
 Toward Tammy's dwelling.

### III

In Tammy's house the clock was twanging  
Nine.

The clock-moon eyes stared blindly on the  
gloom.

One candle on the hearthstone lit the room.

There, dim in candleshine

And deep in yawning chimney-place, Tam bent  
her spine

On a low trundle-stool, to ply the loom

Of rug-work on her lap. She bent more near.

"Judy! Come here."

Judy stood leaning at the window-sill.  
An irised pane ghosted her portrait there:  
Guled round with rusty-golden of her hair  
    Her shadow face was still.  
The dark tick-tacked; a cricket bored his elfin  
    drill;  
A drowsy chimney-swallow waked somewhere;  
Outdoors grum barkings died away, and then  
    Began again.

“Judy! Come here!” “Oh, Aunt, why do they  
    bark?  
I can’t endure to hear ’em.” “Come, I said,  
Come here! Quit mindin’ yonder on the dead.  
    Lor’ knows they make us cark  
And care enough, let ’lone us hankerin’ to hark  
Their yelps.” The tattered caul on Tammy’s  
    head  
Shook; her mouth wrinkled feebly in a flier.  
    “See now; see here.—”

Tam bowed the broken spindle of her face  
And clawed with brittle fingers in her lap.—  
Like a lean winter elm, she was, whose sap  
    Is shrunk beyond trace,  
Or like some cellar insect, pale in a dank place,  
That lurks beneath a musty cider-tap,  
And reaches long and trembling antennæ  
    To hear and see.

“Feel now—my rug: ’t is spoilt. This hank is  
    tore  
Clean through the weave.” “Likely a mouse  
    has been  
And gnawed it.”—“Mouse! I’ll give his tarnal  
    sin  
Come-up-ance! Twice afore  
He’s spoilt my work to spite me; but he’ll pay  
    his score.  
I’ll stick a bramble in his puppet’s skin  
Till he prays God to ease his itchin’ fur.  
Mouse?—Minister!”

"The minister! Why, Aunt Tam, what d' ye mean?"

"Hark, Judy Rhines! I've told ye what a sort Folks called my Granny Luce: "Old Witch," fer short.

I was come seventeen  
When Granny died. She larned me all she'd  
larned and seen,  
And peck o' trouble the church folks gave her  
for 't,  
Till soon they called *me* witch, and druv away  
My work and pay—

"Yes, like as they've done *you* now, 'cause o' me,  
All 'ceptin' what we arn by secret ways.—  
Old Elder Coit was courtin'-spruce them days.  
He kep' me company,  
But quit when I was banned; and, all these  
years long, he  
Has set the min'ster 'gin me when he prays.  
So now he's set John Wharf, the God-believin',  
To curse my weavin',

“And now—now—” Tammy gulped; her thin  
voice snapped  
And crackled, moaning. Judy crooned: “There  
—there—”  
And raised her up in her deep elbow-chair,  
And smoothed the shawl that wrapped  
Her shrivelled body. Tam’s weak head went  
nod; she napped.  
Her black shawl felt the sheen of Judy’s hair.—  
The cricket drilled in ores of black and gold  
And young and old.—

Low seated on the trundle, Judy stirred.  
She winced with her left arm. The arm was  
slung  
Loose in a band of cloth. Her right she hung  
Where the hearth-candle blurred  
Her eyes, that gazed unblinking. Nothing  
mortal heard  
The music of her thoughts. They had no  
tongue

Even for herself as, will-less, her right hand  
Groped in the sand

Beside the hearth and clutched a small charred  
stick.

Slantwise her fingers held it, like a quill.

Slowly it swirled in aimless orbits, till

The sharp black point went *crick*

On the gray stone. Wide-eyed, she stared on  
the flame-wick.

Below, the charry pencil stirred—was still—

Crept on once more; then—idly as a mote

On air—*it wrote*.

“Judy! What ails ye, Judy?” quavered Tam.

The will-less hand still wrote, the void eyes  
stared.

“What’s that? Where are ye, Judy?” Tammy  
flared

Chin-forward.—“Here I am,

Here, aunt: What is it?” “Aye, *what* is it—  
makin’ sham

Or figgurs?" "Figgurs?" Still her soul was  
snared

In twilight, like a child that stumbles from day  
In some dark way

Seeking a lost thing. "Figgurs?" Now her  
eyes

Slow focussed on the hearthstone. "Read!  
Read off

Yonder what's wrote." She read: "'*T is I,*  
*John Wharf.*"

And then, still slower, twice:

"'*T is I, John Wharf.*'"—"Ha, him! So, did I  
tell ye wise?

'T is him that persecutes us with his scoff.

*His* mark! He's owned up now." Tam  
chuckled, wild.

But Judy—smiled.

Whenever Judy smiled, roses came out  
And sorry weather took another seeming.



When Judy knew she smiled, that ruddy gleam-  
ing

Put utterly to rout

Old cankerworms, and sudden buds began to  
pout.—

“That’s funny, Aunt! I must have been  
adreaming,”

She smiled; and smooched the writing with her  
foot

Back in the soot.

Yet in her smile a pallid yearning hid,  
And in her presence splendors far away  
Lingered in afterglow—gray-rose, rose-gray.

“Aye, sign his name, he did,  
In black! ’T was Satan’s chalk he borrered.”

“God forbid,  
Aunt Tam, that he—” She stopped short in  
her say,

For “Judy! Judy! Judy Rhines!” it sang.—  
The door went *bang*.

#### IV

Then silence.—Judy pulled the latch. / She  
    peered  
And shrunk back. Through the doorway, hulk-  
    ing tall,  
Loomed Peter, like a bullock from a stall.  
    The teeth in his red beard  
Laughed white; above his grin the goblin eye-  
    balls leered.—  
“Halloa, thar!” “Peter Bray!—you?” “Me,  
    and all  
These little shiners in a net. Steve ketched  
    'em,  
And so we fetched 'em

“Along to show ye. Come in, gals!” “Who’s  
    there?”

Shrilled Tammy. "Jest it's Pete and Stephen,  
 Aunt;  
 They're bringin' comp'ny." "Comp'ny! What  
 they want  
 This late o' night?" "Don't scare  
 Yerself, Aunt Tam," piped Peter. "We dropt  
 in ter share  
 Some vittals with ye. Not stay long we shan't.  
 Here's pie—and bread—and rum—and barb'ry  
 jam."  
 "Come in," said Tam.

"Come in. Set down," said Judy. In they came  
 And groped amid the dusk for stool and settle.  
 But Peter stood. His brawn was all in fettle,  
 And Judy was a flame  
 To sear flesh, till the tethered stallion in his  
 frame  
 Slavered his bit. He felt her beauty's nettle  
 Sting in his loins, and with her passing look  
 His being shook.

She passed him, bringing newly lighted dips  
For the newcomers. Quick, he reached to aid,  
But she was quicker. Almost he had laid  
    Hand on her finger-tips  
But they eluded, and the light shaft from her  
    lips  
Was glanced to Stephen. "Steve, can't ye  
    persuade  
Peter to sit? What ails the man, so moody?"  
    "Ask that o' Judy,"

Winked Stephen. (The girls giggled.) "He's  
    come up  
To git his fortune told." "So have us all,"  
Joined Peter; "Aunty Tam will make a haul  
    After she's took her sup  
O' rum here.—Spook some coffee-grindin's in  
    your cup,  
Heigh, Aunty, won't ye?" Peter plucked Tam's  
    shawl.  
He slipped a shiny coin and, stooping near,  
    Spoke in her ear:

"Leave Judy read *my* hand; you tend the rest."  
Tam coughed, and bit the coin with a blunt  
tooth.

A little coin, to tell a witch's truth  
Must take her chemic test  
To pass, for witch's spittle is the Alchahest  
Of lover's lead and silver.—Couth is couth,  
And silver passes muster: Tammy's squint  
Gave Peter hint.

He loitered toward the cupboard, lingering  
there.

"Young folks," leered Tam, "I'm old, and I ain't  
able

To stir me round like you be. Shove that table  
Snug up here next my chair,  
So you kin all set nigh—so fashion. Judy,  
where

Be them new coffee-grindin's?" "In the gable-  
Cupboard." "Then git 'em." Peter bulked  
before

The cupboard door.

"I'll help ye." "No, ye needn't." "Yes, I need!  
Your left arm's hurted." "Is it? Who's com-  
plainin'?"

"What ails it?" "Askin'—*you*, that done the  
sprainin'!"

"Me done it!—When?" She freed  
Her shoulder from his clutch. "Now, Peter,  
jest you heed:

That's how you done it last time." "Pish!

'T ain't painin',

Or else ye wouldn't laugh." "Oh, wouldn't I?"

—"By Gorry,

Judy, I'm sorry!"

"Then leave me pass!"—She found a cannister  
And fetched it to the table. "Ah! let see,"  
Sniffed Tam, and smelled inside: "'Aye, here  
they be.

Now don't you make us stir,  
Peter. Here ain't no room for more. You  
set with her

Yonder. My Judy knows more tricks nor me

In these concerns. "But, Aunt, I'd ruther—"

"Nay,  
Do what I say,

"There ain't no room here." Tammy stretched  
a claw

And pinched Nab Morgan by her slender wrist.

"Here, birdie; hold these grindin's in your fist

And feed 'em in your craw;

Now spit 'em in this cup."—A shiver of cold  
awe

Silenced the girlish gigglings. With a twist

Tam turned the cup, and squinted long inside.

But Peter eyed

Judy, and Judy—Peter. Sidling slow,

They sauntered toward the window-bench. She  
gave

A twitchy laugh. "Well, Peter, you'll behave?"

"Sure I'll behave! Ye know

How folks behave that's after what they want."

"And so

You want your fortune told." "Not in my  
grave

I don't. I want it now—right on the spot,  
Not told—but *got!*

"You've got it for me, Judy. Come, go shares,  
And open up the hatches. Let her bust!

What good's a fortun' stowed away for trust?"

"And you call this behavin'? Where's  
Your hand? Set still." He reached it, scraggy  
with red hairs,

Tattooed with purple anchors. Stifled lust  
Throbbled in his pulse, as Judy turned it, calm,  
To read the palm.

The calloused hide was crinkled hard in seams  
Swarted with tarry grime and creosote  
From many a dry-dock'd keel and whaling-boat  
Oar-pulled in ocean streams.—

"So, Judy! Kin you riddle thar what kind o'  
dreams



Goes crazy in a man that's ben afloat  
Nine moons at sea, and never day nor night  
A gal in sight?"

"You ain't afloat now, Peter." "No, I ain't;  
I'm in deep water, Jude; I'm overboard  
And drowndin', prayin' mighty on the Lord  
To save!" "Don't gasp so faint;  
Your life-line's lookin' strong." "Aye, Judy,  
you're the saint,  
You've got 't—my life-line: you kin pull me  
shore'ard  
If you jest keep aholt—take me in tow—  
Never leave go!"

"Leave go yourself, Pete. Quit; you're hurtin'."  
"Will ye,  
Oh, will ye, Judy dear?" "Oh, will I what?"  
"Give me the drink I'm dyin' for!—If not,  
By God, I guess I'll kill ye,  
And you kin axe that drink whar Dogtown  
devils grill ye

In hell.—Ah, God forgive the drowndin'  
thought  
I've sworn.—See, Jude; see, here's a silver  
shillin'!  
Now be ye willin'?"

His words came panting, whispered, but their  
tone  
Thundered in Judy's soul. Almost she cried  
Aloud, but strangers near constrained her pride.  
She sat as still as stone.  
Unhearing, the awe-struck girls harked-on to  
Tammy's drone  
Where close she held her cup, to peer inside  
And with the coffee-grounds prognosticate  
Their listened fate.

"Will ye? I'm waitin'!" Thick he breathed  
and hard.—  
Then flashed a blinding pain, and choking grips  
Crushed on her teeth the blood-flower of her  
lips.

Her mind went reeling, scarred.  
 "Will ye?" "I—will." "Then come. The  
 back-shed door ain't barred.  
 Come quick." "Wait!" "Why?"—One of the  
 lighted dips  
 She lifted in his face.—"What for a light?  
 There's moon tonight."

"Look in the flame. Set still." "What for, the  
 flame?"

"Look in the flame." "What for?" His look  
 went lost.

Nearer she held it, till the eyes were crossed.

"What for?"—His breathing came  
 Quicker, then slower—slow. One arm went  
 limp; his frame  
 Shuddered, then stiffened hard. His face was  
 frost.

Her eyes were litten coals of hate and shame.—  
 "Look—in—the—flame."

## V.

Who knows what messages Tomorrow gets  
From charnelled Yesterday?—what quivering  
thread

Conjoins the buried quick and buried dead?

Who knows, when memory sets  
In dark, what lurid afterglows of old regrets  
Still linger ghostly where the light has sped?  
Or what blind seeds of destiny life sows  
In death—who knows?

Steve Lurvey spoke. "What's thar ye see inside  
The cup, Aunt Tam?" The candle dips shone  
dim.

Nab Morgan nudged; Steve smiled; she smiled  
at him.—

"I see a weddin' bride  
And groom, a fishin' schooner leavin' at low tide  
A lightnin' storm—a drownded man's white  
limb—

A woman waitin' home, with daylight darkin'  
And drownd things barkin'."

"Come 'way, Steve; please come 'way!"

"Hush! Don't take on.—

Who larnt ye see sech-like things, Aunt?" "My  
Granny."

"Your—who?" "My Gran, Luce George: she  
sees 'em canny."

"But she's ben dead-an'-gone  
These years ago!" "And so she has. She's  
over yon,

But she can stick her fingers through the  
cranny

And rouse me up outen my dozin' naps  
With 'er knuckle-raps."

"Her raps?" "Aye, on the table: twice, and  
thrice,

Until I axe her what she wants." "And could  
We axe, and would she answer?" "P'raps she  
would,

If you kin pay her price."

Tam squinted sharp at Steve. Age is not over  
nice

With youth, when youth is in his craving mood  
Of curiosity. "Oh, we'll pay score,"

Said Steve, "and more!"

"Then lay your hands and tetch the fingertips,  
Like so." Lyd, Poll and Lizzy touched; they  
tittered.

The other four laid hands. The smooth grain  
glittered

Dimly. "Blow out the dips."

Steve blew them out. Their faces blurred in  
wan eclipse.

Out of the dusk the chimney-swallow twittered  
And Judy's one flame burned: It did not falter  
On that strange altar

Where Peter's image like an idol froze  
Before the silent neophyte of hate  
Holding her vengeance' rapt novitiate.

Backward her shadow rose  
Over the walls and rafters, deep engulfing those  
Round the hush table. Half incorporate  
She seemed, and held her flame in Peter's  
stare

Like one in prayer.

Across the shadowed circle Tam kept tab  
Over the sitters. From her elbow-chair  
She wrote with crooked finger on the air  
And becked toward shrinking Nab  
Weird signs, like willow patterns on a grave-  
stone slab.

“Gran knows my hand when I kin write it fair.  
She’ll answer when she reads it, twice for Nay  
And thrice for Yea.

“Gran holds her head atilted to one side  
’Cause in her jowl she has a twitchin’ tic;  
So when she comes ye’ll know it in the nick,  
For Gran herself will bide  
In one that’s here.—Aye, here she’s comin’  
now!” Tam wried  
Her neck toward Nabby. Stephen’s heart grew  
sick.  
Nab’s head was tilted sideways, and her eye  
Jerked twitchingly.

The others held their aching fingers taut  
Upon the table board. The board went *tap*.  
They hardly breathed. Twice more they heard  
it rap.

“Yea, yea, ye’re quick as thought,  
Gran Luce. Give ye good even!” Steve’s quick  
hearing caught



The whisper-gasped "Good even" through the  
gap  
Of Nabby's twisting mouth.—"Yea, now ye're  
come,  
'T is welcome home,

"And tell us, Gran, who have ye fetched to-  
night?  
Is it the Murky Man with cock's feet—him  
That flew, last time, out at the chimney rim  
And pulled ye clean from sight  
Along with 'm?"—*One* and *one* it rapped.  
"Nay, then, it might  
Be some one godlier mayhap and prim  
Would axe a blessin', without horn nor hoof,  
On my poor roof?"

The silence tingled. Low it knocked, then  
loud:  
Once, twice, thrice. Slow the shadow-door  
swung back.  
Against the night one stood there, all in black,

Bare-headed. A faint cloud  
Of quivering moonshine wrapt his body like a  
    shroud,  
And round his hair the risen moon's bright  
    wrack  
Glowed like a halo.—“God His holy Grace  
    Dwell in this place!”

The table tipped, stools banged, the settle  
    tumbled.  
“Ha-ha!” screamed Tam, “ye’re come, John  
    Wharf o’ mine,  
To own your mark what Satan made ye sign  
    With brimstone, when he humbled  
Your lyin’ tongue.” The scared girls squealed  
    to hide and stumbled.  
“I knocked, but no one answered. May the Vine  
Of His Salvation strangle in these and thee  
    God’s Enemy!”

“Aye, aye, it has ’em strangled—deef and dumb.  
Look at the gal.” “Nab, Nabby dear!” cried  
    Steve,

"Tilt up your head." "Go forth, Apollyon!

Leave

This child." John touched the numb  
Body. Nab choked, and sobbed on Stephen's  
shoulder.—"Come,  
Sweety, let's go!" They went.—"As old as Eve  
Thy sin is, woman!" Clutched in trembling rout,  
The girls rushed out.

John Wharf turned back to call. Before him  
knelt

A young form by a bearded fetich cold.  
Her candle flared the mist of rusty gold  
That rimmed her face. He felt  
Her throbbing quiet and the quickened air, that  
smelt .  
Of ripening grapes in arbor. Ages old  
That instant and that kneeling image seemed;  
Or else he dreamed.

" 'T is I, John Wharf. What mortal sin is here  
Of witch's sorcery? What are these signs?"

"And so ye're come, John Wharf. I'm Judy Rhines."—

He looked at her, austere  
Yet hesitant, as if he tried to summon clear  
Something that beckoned from the pale confines  
Of memory—a bright shape far away,  
Gray-rose, rose-gray.

"What spell is here that turns warm flesh to stone?

Surely this dwelling is the Devil's lair!  
Who is this man? Why does he sit and stare  
So silent, all alone?"

"'T is Peter Bray. Ye're right. The Devil's got his own

In Pete." She touched Pete's brow. The sullen glare

Kindled. She touched his mouth: "Talk!"—  
At her word

The dumb lips stirred

And spluttered, like a rescued drowner strangling.

“Ha! Will ye, Jude? Come on. The backshed door—

’T ain’t barred. Come quick! What for, a light?—What for?—”

His body wrenched; the dangling  
Arm straightened up; he winked and winked;  
the dark went spangling  
With little lighted wicks, that gleamed before  
A man’s stern face.—What man?—The minister,  
Gazing with *her*,

With *her*, his Judy Rhines,—gazing at him.  
He lurched upon the floor, reaching to shut  
Their eyes away. “Who’s thar? By God, you  
slut—”

He saw them growing dim.—  
“Who’s thar ye’ve got, ye whorin’ strump?”  
He seemed to swim

Towards her.—“By crack, jest leave me bag  
your scut,  
I’ll skin ye the rest offen!” He spat foam.  
“Peter, go home.”

John eyed him.—“Home!” He winced; he  
swore; he went.  
His big shape darked the doorway; he was gone.  
John yearned toward the young figure:  
“Judy”—“John,”  
She murmured. Her voice sent  
A stealing wonder, like strange wine of sacra-  
ment  
Through his wrought spirit. Where her candle  
shone  
Sudden it fell, and Judy lay there, white  
In the moon’s light.

Tam scuttled from her corner. “Lawks! she’s  
fainted.

It takes the likes o' you to fetch bad luck  
On me and mine and run our house amuck!"

"Witch, 't is thyself hath tainted  
This wretched child, whose soul had otherwise  
been sainted

By her young innocence. Look; she has struck  
Her arm; 't is wounded." "Nay 't was Peter  
done 't

By sprainin' on't

"With his sweetheartin' last time he come  
here."—

"Judy, look up! Poor Judy,—are you better?"  
Feebly she smiled. Her smile was a bright  
fetter

To hold his spirit near  
To hers, for her salvation. "Judy, never fear;  
All this shall pass." Tam scowled. "John  
Wharf, you let 'er

Be! I kin tend what's mine by blood and bone.  
You tend your own!"

"Mine own are where the sick have need of me.  
Where is her bed?" "In thar—the gable room."  
John raised the drooping body. Through the  
gloom

He bore it tenderly  
Where Tammy groped ahead and mumbled.  
Stooping, he  
Laid her on quilted softness dark as tomb.  
"And are you better now?" Her voice breathed  
deep:

"Yes; now I'll sleep."

He tiptoed back. Tam grumbled to her rest.  
He listened: all the inner room was still.  
The hour twanged: the cricket answered shrill.  
His spirit was the guest  
Of presences that thronged the tumult of his  
breast,  
But quiet was his shadow on the sill  
And lingered there, till moonlight paled in  
dawn;  
Then it was gone.



## VI

Between late August and the equinox  
Hovers a dreamy season frail and fleet:  
Then slender-falling water is very sweet  
    To hear among great rocks,  
Tinkling in golden tones the calling cat-bird  
    mocks  
Beside a pool, where willows sway to meet,  
And, long ago, young Judy saw her face in  
    That bright-dark basin.

She saw her face, and laughed to see it there  
Lit by the scarlet flames of cardinal flowers.  
Up the inverted sky in tumbling showers  
    Cool sunshine splashed her hair  
Bright copper in water-blueness. All of old  
    despair  
And dreads of night had lost their eerie powers  
Where glad she passed along her morning trail  
    To fill her pail

With brook water, for Tam to boil her tea.  
In dipped the pail: The current-poising trout  
Flicked off, but up she dipped a minnow out  
    And spilled him. On her knee  
She groped amid the ferns to save him. Suddenly  
She felt her hand touched warm. She turned  
    about.—  
“Fishing ashore?” “Ah, Master Wharf,—it’s  
    you!”  
“What shall I do

"Now that I've caught him?" On his open  
hand

He held the minnow. "Please! oh, leave him go."  
John slipped him back. They watched him  
dart below.

"How helpless on strange land  
He is—how strong in his true home! You  
understand?"

Her eyes looked up. "Last night was strange,  
you know.

This little fish hath preached a parable.  
Remember it well."

He lifted the pail. "And are *you* going home,  
Judy? Or are you lost upon the way  
That leads where in the dark last night you lay?"

"That's where I live, Sir." "Come,  
Sit down. That is not where you live. Long  
since, in Rome,  
St. Paul revealed where all of us who pray  
For life shall live. Dear child, we live in faith  
And not in death:

"In faith and hope and love; these three in one  
Are God. In Him we live." "The dead can  
live

I guess, Sir, without God. 'Least, I believe

They can." "He sent his Son  
To tell us otherwise." "Whatever have we done  
For dead folks, then, to plague us?" "Devils  
give

Those fears to plague you." "Nay, Sir, 'tain't  
all sham.

You axe Aunt Tam:

"Her Granny Luce had larned us more than  
tricks.

'T was her that helped me to turn Peter cold.  
Oh, Sir, don't tell Aunt Tammy that I told:

'T was her that burnt the ricks  
Of Neighbor Coit last year. She trimmed our  
candle-wicks

And told Gran Luce to fire his new sheep-fold.  
Oh, Sir, I hate the awful things us do;

But, Sir, it's true!"

“Nay, Satan is Delusion, he is lies,  
 And Faith destroys Delusion. Put away  
 Satan!” “How *can* I do it, what you say—  
     Make this world otherwise  
 When so it is—*his* world? Even you it won’t  
     surprise  
 May be, when you remember yesterday:  
 What time last evenin’ did ye guess you’d come  
     Up to my home?”

“What hour? Let see: I think ’t was nine  
     o’clock  
 For Molly Millet told me—” “Only *her*?  
 And was there nothin’ else that made ye stir?  
     Three three’s is nine: her knock.  
 Who was it called ye, when ye felt the spirit  
     shock  
 And answered plain: ‘’T is I, John Wharf’?—  
     Ah, Sir,  
 Forgive me!” “Yea, but I remember now:  
     Judy,—’t was *thou*!

"I stood alone beside my study door.  
Molly had gone, but yet I felt no sign  
To go. Just then the clock was telling Nine,  
    And dimly there before  
My sight *you* rose from a low trundle on the  
    floor.  
Your eyes were sad and pleaded unto mine.  
I spoke, and in a mist of rose-and-gray  
    You paled away.—

"Then I went forth to Dogtown." John looked  
    round  
At Judy, where they rested on a stone.  
His young, grave face grew old: it sought her  
    own,  
    Then stared upon the ground.  
The drip of falling water made a dreamy  
    sound.  
"Oh, Sir,—John Wharf—forgive me! If I'd  
    known,  
I'd never so have sinned." "What sin was thine  
    Also was mine;

“And if it be that Satan’s snare entwines  
Us both, then we must break it, both, together  
And seek in prayer a bond of holier tether.

O Judy—Judy Rhines,  
What witchcraft weaves you round that Christ  
the Lord enshrines  
Its charnel in such wonder? Tell me whether  
I pray, or sin, that—looking on your face—  
I pray for grace!”

“Nay, never pray towards me. Ye see this arm  
Last night was sprained, and now ’t is healed,

I guess:

Sir, you’re a minister; leave me confess.

’T was Peter done the harm  
Ahankerin’ for more; but me, I worked the  
charm

Or else he would ’a lusted for me less.

O Sir, the dead—the livin’ dead—they clutch  
My heart so much,

“And make my days so eerie, and Aunt Tam  
Has heavied my nights and days with hatin’  
things

So long, sometimes my spirit takes and flings  
All thinkin’ off, like flam,  
And jest goes livin’, lovin’, naked like I am,  
Feelin’, and makin’ others feel, what brings  
Their love upon me. So what makes me glad  
Made Peter bad;

“But me, that made him so, ain’t I the same  
In sinnin’? Ain’t I, Sir?” John’s life-blood  
surged  
Within him. “Child, the charnel must be  
purged—

Our hearts be cleansed. The blame  
Is Antichrist’s, who taints our glory with his  
shame;  
But I—O God!” He stopped. His face was  
scourged  
By inward lightnings, which he smothered under  
To curb their thunder.



"Why don't ye say the words?" "What words?"

"The ones

That's in your mouth." He gazed at her, constrained.

*"He who would cleanse must be himself unstained,*

*But I am soiled."* (—Her tones

Her looks were *his*.) "Weren't them the words?" "What dark touchstones

Were yours, to fathom what my mind contained?

How could you tell my thoughts, and speak them so?"

"Sometimes I know

"The words before folks speak. I hear them all Out loud, like some one told me how they ran."

"Who told you these?" "I guess 't was her—dead Gran."

"Let be! Let be! The scall

Of Satan shends thee, child. His venom can bespawl

God's cleanest shrine, and make of hallow'd man  
An ulcered thing. Cast out this prying evil!

'T was he, the Devil,

"Who gave thee power to read my secret  
thought,

And drew last night my spirit to thee.—Yea,  
I, too, am soiled. I, too, was led away

By his dark hand, and brought  
To hell's abyss: 'T is so in secret we are  
caught

And damned."—"How can we 'scape him?"—

"We can pray,  
And Christ, who heareth all beyond the grave,  
May cleanse and save."

John took her hand. "Pray with me, Judy  
child."

In crinkled fern they sank on bended knee.

Above them glimmered a green rowan tree

Red flecked with berries wild;

A myrtle warbler flashed, the summer morning  
smiled;  
Kingscandle burned pale tapers tremblingly,  
And falling water, falling smooth and slender,  
Made music tender.

“Dear Christ, who rose unblemished from the  
dead  
To heal the sins of Thy forbidden fruit,  
Let not Thy secret Enemy pollute  
This child. Yea, shield her head  
From God the Father’s wrath, or let it fall in-  
stead  
On me, her minister.—Our sins commute!”  
“Nay, when we’re tryin’ to shed our sins, like  
now,  
Lord, tell us how!”

Cried Judy; and she added, speaking shy:  
“O Master Wharf, I don’t know jest to pray

To Him. I never larned. I ruther *you'd* say  
What's right, and then I'd try  
To foller." John rose up. He raised her  
silently  
And looked long in her face.—"Will you obey  
What's right?" "I'll try." "Then follow me.  
Come home," said he.

John took the pail. Across the dappled brook  
He stepped—a pensive shadow, silent, black.  
Behind him Judy watched the awkward back  
Bend forward like a rook  
Stooping from stone to stone; but where her  
yearning look  
Followed his form along the climbing track,  
She thought a shape so grand in power and awe  
She never saw.

## VII

A little window with a wooden door  
Peeped from the back of Tammy's cabin.

There

Tam lurked when neighbors passed, to catch  
them where

They crossed the bridge before

Her trap: Pop open she pulled it with a string,  
to explore

Their teams, and make their oxen stand and  
stare

With tongues lolled out, till they paid toll, poor  
lumpkins,

In corn or pumpkins.

And while the gossips tattled on, they said  
No basketful of pickerel, fresh from creek,  
Was safe to pass that spot, but Tam would  
wreak

Wrath on the owner's head  
Till he went empty-handed home in angry  
dread;  
And children crept by, lest she hear the squeak  
Of the old trestle-beam, and stick her cap  
Out at the trap

And wag it till their little heads went noddy.—  
So creaked the trestle now, as Judy passed  
With John. Wide flew the shutter. "Wall, at  
last!

How long'll ye keep a body  
Waitin'? Ye know I want my tea afore my  
toddy."

Tam's face peered out.—"Now, Judy Rhines,  
how da'st

Ye fetch that man along of ye?—John Wharf,  
Jest you keep off

My premises! Come round the front door, gal.”  
*Slam* shut the window. Judy followed John  
 Around the lilac bush, where he set down  
     The water-pail. “What shall  
 We do, Sir?” Tam leaned from the door. “You  
     tattertal,  
 Keep off, I tell ye. Leave my bucket yon  
 And settle your own concerns—with Solomon  
     Grundy  
     Was buried o’ Sund’y!”

Tam coughed. She daubed her thumb, and  
     sniffled snuff  
 Out of her withered palm. John flashed a  
     frown.—  
 “Thomazine Younger, you have wronged this  
     town.

Our folks have borne enough  
 Of your clandestine heresies. Their evil scruff  
 Corrupts our youth and soils our fair renown.  
 The elders of my church have bade me warn,  
     Lest you suborn

"The innocent to learn your—" "Ho, your  
godly

Elders! 'Tis Master Coit,—Zorobbabel,  
Ye're meanin'?—Now leave Harry come from  
hell

And fetch his ca'cass bod'ly  
Away with him!" "Cease, woman! else it shall  
go hardly

With you, if the Elders' doom must needs  
compel

Your peace.—*One* child you shall not keep from  
Christ.

It hath sufficed

"For Judy here to serve your errant will  
Unwitting where it led. But now no more!

Her eyes are opened to the light; the door

Of that seductive ill

Is closed; and she shall never cross its darkling  
sill

Again." "Not cross my sill—won't Judy?

Lor'!



But you *aire* turnin' Prophet Jeremiah!

Come; call him liar,

"Judy, and git us riddance of his clatter."

"Speak, Judy child: You promised to obey  
The right. Now, will you choose?"—She murmured "Yea,"

And stopped. She heard the patter  
Of chipmunks on dry leaves; they seemed to  
chase and scatter

Her thoughts with little frisking tails in play.

"Which—Christ, or Tammy?"—"Bein' like I  
am,

I'll stick by Tam,

"I guess." John stared at her; but Tammy  
cackled

Loud as a lean hen-mother ruffed with spite.

"But you—you promised to obey the right."

"I did."—The chipmunks crackled  
Loose shingles on the house roof. Judy's  
tongue was shackled

To heavy weights upon her heart. Her sight

Turned dim. "The right what we was talkin'  
of—  
Ain't it—to love?"

"It is."—"So, then, may be I didn't know.  
I guess I don't love Christ, but Tam—I do.  
Only if you'd a-said—not Him, but—" "Who?"

The quick-caught breath, the glow  
Of heart-flame on the cheek, where rose-lights  
come and go—

Tam's old sight was too blear to catch their  
cue.

She called "Come in, Jude!" Judy bent her  
head.

"Goodbye," she said,

And stooped to pick a gray flower at her feet.  
Above its clustered hearts her blurred eyes  
shone

Fast winking, while she handed it to John.

---

“It grows right here, and sweet  
To smell. They call it Life Everlasting.” His  
heart beat  
Quick pain. He smelled faint fragrance. She  
was gone.  
“O Christ!” he prayed, “O flower of thirst and  
fasting—  
Life Everlasting!”

## VIII

To walk in summer quiet soothes the heart  
That strains to burst the leash-cord of its limbs:  
To walk alone, and chant aloud great hymns  
    That make the deep pines start  
Their organ-ludes, where lingering orioles take  
    part  
In lonely intervals: to climb the rims  
Of solitary rocks, and find release  
    Of power—is peace.

John walked in summer quiet. He walked to  
 think  
 His pent soul free of thoughts. He walked to  
 fill  
 The ache of thought with beauty. He lay still  
 High on the shelving brink  
 Of a huge boulder's roofbeam, where he heard  
 the clink  
 Of the quarryman's hammer call from Railcut  
 Hill,  
 Tapping to pulses of a spirit tabor  
 Love songs of labor.

He lay and saw—upstaring at the sky—  
 Visions of Christ the Savior in white flame  
 Walking with Judy. Down the blue they came  
 And passed him quiet by,  
 Conversing with each other low and tenderly.  
 She held a small drab flower, and spoke a  
 name—

“John,” and she asked: “Why does it grow  
in hell  
So sweet to smell?”

And following after them, in peaked hats,  
Black Elders strutted from a little church.  
One muttered: “Don’t tread near them, lest  
they smirch  
Our gowns.” And one said: “That’s  
The child. They say she turns all pretty birds  
to bats  
About her dwelling. Tell John Wharf to search  
The place and see.” And where their shapes  
went darking  
He heard them barking.

He rose and stared around. Still, far below,  
He heard the barking sound. It died away.  
He bowed his head. Clutching he kissed the  
gray  
Flower in his hand. “’T is so!

'T is so!" he whispered, "But Lord God, I did  
not know."

Once more he strode on in the summer day,  
Where yellow butterflies, bright-wing'd from  
bath,  
Fluttered his path.

The footpath turned and plunged. He followed  
it  
Into a barren gulley, bleak as where  
Lost Christian strayed and met the Giant  
Despair.

He watched a bittern flit  
On lumbering wings, to vanish in a swampy  
pit  
Of cedars. So he passed to balmier air  
Along the moor grass, where deep wheel ruts  
showed  
The old back road.

Across ripe fields he passed, where golden rod  
And purple asters mixed in glowing tide.

Dull-orange daisies stared at him, ox-eyed,  
And bursting milkweed pod  
Spirited white filmy seeds. He watched them  
drift toward God  
Like his wild thoughts. Then quick he turned  
aside  
And, climbing, reached the top of Gravel Hill.  
There he stood still.

Far off he saw the shores of Ipswich Bay  
And Newburyport gleam in the sea's blue fires:  
Sweet Newburyport, the town of lovely spires!  
There, on hush Sabbath day,  
In blue-bright Merrimac the Christ-clean spirits  
lay  
Their sins, home welcomed with baptismal  
choirs.  
How often *he* had helped that hallow'd quest—  
Their pastor's guest.

“O Faith and Hope and Love!”—The preach-  
er's words



Came fresh and strange and wild with mystic  
scope.

Under an elm he lay, on a green slope

Where tawny-golden herds

Dreamed-by like hornèd beasts of Revelation.

Birds

Dreamed in the noon. They waked toward  
night. "O Hope,"

They sang, "O Faith, and ever-brooding Dove  
Of Christ—O Love!"

## IX

Song is the soul. Deep in the primal slime  
A reptile loved and sang. The hyla's throat,  
Evolving seraph wings, still throbs remote  
Through million forms of time  
In Philomel's rapt song and Dante's soaring  
rhyme.—

John felt it throbbing now. He heard it float  
Up from the pasture earth, primeval, wild,  
Half man, half child:

*"Moon went into poplar tree,  
An' star went into blood;—  
"O my sin is forgiben an' my soul set free!"—*

So rich

And soft and unctuous it rose, John started  
To find the singer. Deep and mellow-hearted  
Once more it tuned that pitch  
Of gladness. John drew nearer. Standing in  
a ditch

Of blue clay, where a load of stones lay carted,  
He spied his black bird. "Ha! So that's you,  
Tie?" \*

"Yas'r, Massa,—me an' I."

*"Meet, O Lord, on de milk-white horse"—Old  
Tie*

Blinked her bright eyes and laughed up in the  
sun.

Sweat shined her black face, crinkled like a bun.

Her workman's smock was wry,

\* An authentic character. See Note, at the end.

And through green tattered breeches a great-  
    muscled thigh  
Bulged, as she raised a stone to lay upon  
The new wall she was building—building strong  
    Of rock and song:

*"In de mornin' w'en I rise,  
    Tell my Jesus howdy, O!*  
*"Wash my han' in de mornin' glory—"* Slaves  
Had pens in Dogtown. After nightfall there  
"Old Ruth" would climb her creaking, outdoor  
    stair  
    Above the stern conclaves  
Of pious Puritans, among whose honored graves  
No crumbling slab betokens anywhere  
"Old Ruth" or "Tie," yet builded of her hand  
    The stone walls stand.

*"Drop on, drop on de crown on my head"—*  
    Ha-ha!  
*An' roly in my Jesus' arm!"*—Dis gospel  
    hymnin'

Dat sho' done keep my drowned soul aswim-  
 min',  
 An' make dis old crow-bar  
 Light 's a paddle to row me." "Tell me, Tie,  
 why are  
 You happy?" "Me? Cuz, Massa, 'mong de  
 women  
 Ise glad Ise man, an' 'mong de man, glad sho'  
 Ise woman. So

"Ise glad Ise bof togedder an' saved." Tie spat  
 And chuckled. "Ole Massa Coit done boughten  
 me  
 Off de Port Royul ship. He tink, says 'e,  
 'Dat be strong nigger, dat  
 Feller,' an' so he setted me to buildin' at  
 Dese stone wall. Long year while ago dat  
 be."—  
 And once more from Tie's throat, primeval,  
 sweet,  
 The wild tune beat:

*"O my sin is forgiven an' my soul set free!"—*

John's heart

Throbb'd with the tune; his voice leaped in  
her strain.

They lifted it together—again—again.

Tie took the alto part

And John the tenor. Clear he heard his own  
voice start

Echoes that fell from sunset like gold rain

Where round him shone, through red of wild-  
rose hips,

The Apocalypse.

Rose hips and barberries, vermillion bright

'Mid green-pale leaves against the pale-green  
west:

Rose hips and barberries, and Judy dresst

In dim blue, bending slight

Over the wall, and through a mist of coppery  
light

Her round mouth singing—"Judy?" His hand  
presst

His eyes. He faltered: "Judy, is it true?  
And this—is you?"

"I heerd you singin' and I come to join  
Your hymn. Don't stop—O please!" His eye-  
lids shut;  
He held that bright face fast. He longed to cut  
Her image on a coin  
Of gold, or clean new-minted copper, to purloin  
And hoard, untouched forever.—"Judy, but  
How far you've come from home! The sun will  
set  
Soon. If you'll let,

"I'll see you back." ('Nay, coin could never  
grave  
The color of that smile,' he thought; 'Ah, no!  
But in her hair ripe barberries—only so  
For memory to save  
The bloom of her bright spirit!') But the old  
black slave

Called: "Goodnight, Massa! Sun he layin'  
low,  
An' Moon she peepin' ober de wall, so den  
Goodnight! Amen!"

And Tie jogged off. Her kinked head, hoar'd  
with white,  
Bobbed to her ploughhorse pace. Below the  
hill  
*"Sin is forgiven"* she was singing still,  
And far beyond their sight  
*"My soul set free!"* rose darkling as a dream-  
bird's flight  
And fell in silence.—"Judy! 'T is God's will:  
You heard?" "What, John?" "Our sin for-  
given. We  
In Christ are free."

"You, John—not me. I chose Tam." "And  
your choice  
Was right. You followed love. Love is the  
Way



Of Christ. Oh, I have followed it all day  
Ever since I heard your voice  
Saying 'It grows right here,' and gave me, to  
rejoice,  
His pathflower — *His* — Life Everlasting!"  
"Nay,  
Don't show it me now. Don't John, I'm 'most  
afraid  
For what I said."

"Afraid? And shall we be afraid of Love?  
You said, if I had said not Him but—*Who?*  
I asked; and even while I asked, I knew  
Whom you were speaking of:  
Of *me*, not Christ! But that were sacrilege  
above  
All sacrilege, had it not been that you  
Saw Christ *through me*—saw Love, who burns  
even now  
Here in my brow,

"Here in my breast, even *Him!* For I have  
learned

This day to know He will not be denied  
The dream he seeks. The Bridegroom seeks  
his bride,

Nor can his quest be spurned  
By Satan's will. Not Tam your spirit turned  
To first—but me, and Christ through me hath  
cried

To save you—yea, by Love, and not by Hate,  
Who hath no mate,

"By Love, who mateth in the Holy Ghost"—

"No, no! Don't leave me witch you too, John  
Wharf,

Not you! The rest's enough. God's sake, keep  
off

Your hands! Don't leave Gran boast  
I fetched *you* in her snare."—"Let dead souls  
do their most,

They shall not blight our flower of life, nor  
dwarf

The seed it bears." He kissed the small gray  
flower.

She felt his power

Quicken her soul with flame, where ruddy light  
Of sundown blent their mingled shadows.

"John,

—John!" "Ah, Judy dear!"—A shape came on  
Against the coming night

Flinging enormous shadow-limbs. "Ho, thar!  
Hold tight!

A shillin'—a silver shillin', Jude! I've won.  
Now maybe you're the slut I says, or ain't ye?  
By God, I'll paint ye

"Red-scarlet in the meetin'-house for this—  
And you, ye thievin', God-believin' cur!  
She's mine! I paid my shillin' down for her,  
And now you're crimpin' the kiss  
I bargained for."—John blazed: "Enough!  
God's patience is

Not always meek." "Ho, chuck your minister!  
Ye're jest a he-male snoopin' after she,  
Like what I be,

"And which on us is picked to be a winner  
God ain't the umpire." "Listen, Peter Bray—"  
"Thanks, Jude! But th' ain't no candleshine  
by day

"Fer you ter freeze a sinner  
Dead stiff agin. So, Johnny Wharf, here goes a  
chinner

Fer you!" And hot as hammer, where sparks  
spray

The glaring blacksmith, Pete's sledge-fist de-  
livered

His blow. John quivered

Limp in the ditch, face downward in blue clay.  
Bright on his chin-bone oozed a reddening clot.  
Pete kicked him sideways. "Last time what I  
shot

A muskrat, so he lay  
Squirmin'. And now, Jude dear, next time I  
call, you'll pay

That little shinin' silver shillin' what  
I loaned ye. So long!"—Judy sank upon  
The clay by John.

## X

Sabbath: How like an angel's voice the bell  
Trembles the rhythmic air—an angel, blessing  
With peace the soul of passion, and caressing

The heart where tumults dwell:

Now peace for the living pilgrim, now his part-  
ing knell

Of death, it sounds. Man's days on earth are  
pressing

Onward, and ever as they number Seven

He turns toward heaven.

Tom Stacy, parish clerk, has tied his nag  
Under the shed and reached the meeting house.  
The porch key grates. He steps in. A gray  
mouse

Goes scurrying zigzag  
Across the vestry, while he fumbles for a rag  
To dust the pews and pulpit. A wild grouse  
Drums, as he opens a shutter, looking toward  
The still graveyard.

He pulls bell. Now hoofs thud, wheels whine  
on gravel:

Far scattered worshippers unite their ways.  
Nicholas Kintvil reins his team of bays,  
Sweat-foamed from ten miles travel,  
To hail Si Chard, horseback. Their tongues  
unravel

A week of news, till Dan Stone backs his chaise  
Against Si's cruppers. "Heigh, you thar, you  
mopes!

Whar's y' hitchin' ropes?"

"Shucks, Dan, you'd oughtn't steer your rig  
like that.

Thar's Nabby Morgan in Steve Lurvey's buggy.  
*He* steers right smart." "They're gigglin'  
mighty huggy

Looks like to me." "Tit's tat

With them, I guess."—"Here comes John Eal-  
ing's democrat

Full up with more gals. This hot spell's too  
muggy

To crowd a trap so tight. Look now, he'll spill  
it!"

"Thar goes Moll Millet

"Walkin' her lone." "Jest hear Eliakim's mare  
Whinny! Last month she yeaned twin fillies."

"Well, Alvin Lincoln,—fetchin' water lilies

To trim church, I declare!

You al'ays did find plenty workin' time to spare  
For pretty deeds. The way is whar the will is."

“Hush! Here’s the Stanwood ladies. When  
they stir,  
Sweet lavender

“Seems growin’ round their feet. They ain’t  
like others.”

—So teams are hitched and blanketed from gall  
Of flies. Old folks in Sunday black, and small  
Children held fast by mothers’  
Hands, saunter toward the meeting-house,  
where silence smothers  
The horseshed prattle; for in his carry-all  
Alone, bolt upright, leering looks adroit,  
Sits Zorab Coit.

Beside the porch he tossed his reins to Stephen  
And waddled out—stub-leggèd, thick of  
paunch,  
Pug as a woodchuck squatting up on haunch.  
Under his chin, shaved even,  
His white beard curled, round like a bib, and  
bald as shriven



Monk was his skull. His nose stuck sharp,  
and staunch  
His neckbone topped his spine; but over his  
priggish  
Mouth, the bright piggish

Eyes slitted slant through lids of puffy skin.  
Always they seemed to lurk for some surprise—  
Angling, alert, yet unobtrusive eyes:  
There were no comings-in  
Nor goings-out but they detected secret sin  
At work. "Good day, Miss Nabby; you look  
wise  
This mornin'." "Me, Sir?" "Wa'n't it you was  
driven  
Past me by Stephen?"

"Oh, Mr. Lurvey; yes, Sir. He's gone now  
To hitch your team." Nab's face turned white,  
then rosy.  
"So he is! What's that he's fetchin' back—a  
posy?"

I s'pose you don't know how  
He spent last Friday evenin'? My best corn-  
fed sow  
Died Friday evenin'." "Oh, Sir!" "You don't  
s'pose he  
Knows *why* she died?" "Who—Mr. Lurvey?  
Oh, Sir,  
I'm sure—Oh, no, Sir."

"'Cause I saw lights go past, up Dogtown way,  
'Fore nine o'clock; and there was extry  
barkin'."—

"Aye, Sir, 't was Steve and Nabby: they was  
sparkin'—"

"Now, Moll, how da'st you say—"

"I da'st say more what's so! 'T was Peter, too,  
and they

Had Lyddy, Peg and Liz along, remarkin'  
They'd go see Judy Rhines."—Steve loomed  
and glared.

Moll stood, unscared.

"Well, Stephen, ain't it so?" "Cool, now, young folks!

Keep cool! This is the Lord's day. While that bell Still rings, we'll stay here in the porch.—Now tell:

Is this one o' your jokes,  
Steve Lurvey?" "What you mean, Sir?"

"Tryin' to coax  
Young girls to sell their souls?" "What, me?"

"How well

Do you know Judy Rhines?"—"Leave me confess,

Nabby!—Why, yes,

"I know Jude Rhines, Sir.—She's a witch."

"A witch!"

The porch buzzed like a bee cloud swarming.

Young

And old stuck heads together. Each loosed a tongue:

"One night I heerd a scritch

Outen her ell." "Her broom's all wore down to  
a switch."

"I set a trap nigh Tam's house—found it sprung  
And *nothin' in't!*" "They're *both* queer.  
What can ail 'em?"

"They knowed, down Salem."

"Ye've made a bad charge, Steve. What can  
you bring

Of proof she be a witch, as you aver?"

"Hush, Nab, hush up!—This silver button, Sir.  
She wears one arm in sling.

Wall, Sir, last week, I shot a crow in the left  
wing

With this same button, what was *found in her*  
*Left arm!*" "In Judy's arm?" "Yes, Sir, next  
day!—

The crow flew 'way,

"But jes' next mornin' Peter called to see  
Judy—" "Who—Peter Bray?" "Yes, Sir.  
She said

Sence day before, her left arm felt half dead  
 And hurted so, that he  
 Lanced in her with his knife and soon he  
 fetched it free—  
 Yes, Sir, this button—silver, look! That red  
 Is Judy's blood ye see thar. For the rest  
 Axe Pete, you'd best."

The bell stopped ringing, and the iron hum  
 Dwindled in quivering echoes on the air.  
 The sudden hush struck all to silence there.  
 Some stole inside, but some  
 Waited for Zorab. "Whar's the minister?—Not  
 come?  
 This sorcery is his concarn. Repair  
 To y' pews, my brethren. Steve and I will wait.  
 John Wharf is late."

Nab tugged at Stephen's sleeve. She eyed the  
 Elder  
 Whose face peered down the road. She whis-  
 pered quick:

"Don't tell what *we* done, Friday night!"

—"Now, chick,

Be I a fool?" He held her

Hand, squeezing. "Nab?" But Zorab was a  
master welder

Of broken question-marks. He clinched 'em,  
click,

With one ear.—"Stephen ain't *too* big a fool,  
Miss Nab. Keep cool."

Nab flustered in. Poor Stephen crumpled  
under.

"The weather 'pears like storm. It's fearful  
hot."

"'T is so,—and hotter whar there's sin." "I  
thought

I heerd a—wa'n't that thunder?"

"Heat lightnin' 's buzzin' round a bit. And  
whar, I wonder,

Is Master Wharf?" "Hemight 'a gone, like 's not,

To Tammy's." "Oh! So *he* was thar, o' Friday?"

"Yes, Sir." "That's tidy

"For John. And thar he comes now.—Bull o' Bashan!

Who's that awalkin' 'side of him—not Judy Rhines?" "Yep, that's her!" "Not bringin' here that goody

To meetin'! All creation

Won't stand that! Mebbe, though, he'd let the Lord's damnation

Strike her right here in church. I wonder—would he?

That man ye can't jest put your finger on.

He's young yet—John."

A little sullen breeze was slowly stirring  
The smoke-bush near the porch. The sky was  
dun

Above the belfry, where the nooning sun  
Glared round and brassy. Whirring

Of grouse wings drumbled far; and from the  
maples, chirring

Cicadas sang.—There, timid as a nun  
With eyelids earthward, Judy came with her  
Pale minister.

“Good morrow, Elder Coit.” “Good mornin’,  
Master

Wharf.” “Good day, Stephen.” “’Day, Sir.”  
John passed on

And Judy followed. Gabriel’s clarion  
Could not have summoned faster

To judgment than the voice of Zorab: “For a  
pastor

That’s late, you take your time this mornin’,  
John,

And what might be your text?” “My text is  
Sin,

Judy,—go in.”



## XI

The musty gloom struck chill. Slow down the  
aisle  
Their black forms passed. He touched an  
empty pew  
And bowed. She slipt by, seated full in view  
Of eyes that yield no smile  
Where hers turn wistful. Gaunt he climbed  
the pulpit, while  
Zorab and Stephen took dim places. Through  
Green shutters slitting light flecked, and one  
square  
Of gold fell where

A sash, half lifted, let in the hot day.  
Gowns rustled faint. A child, begun to itch,  
Squeaked, stifled. Through the hush a whis-  
pered "Witch"

Flew hissing.—"Let us pray!  
*Our Father which art—*" The mired souls  
struggle in their clay  
For Power and Glory. The thin pipe blows for  
pitch.  
They sing: "*Why do we mourn departing  
friends?*"

The first hymn ends.

Now down the mat new boots cry creakle-creak.  
Tom Stacy tiptoes, poling the Lord's platter  
Along the aisle. The penny pieces patter  
Like droppings from the leak  
Of maple-sap in pan. Tom stops. In Judy's  
cheek  
The bright blood startles.—"What can be the  
matter?"

Heads crane to spy. "She's dropt it in!—  
 Tam's niece!  
 A shilling-piece!"

Again the sudden pitch pipe, shrill and brittle,  
 Sounds key: "*What scenes of horror and of  
 dread,*"

They sing, "*Await the sinner's dying bed!*"

They spare no jot or tittle  
 Of wrath to mix the cauldron brew of Satan's  
 spittle  
 To scald their sinner. Judy thinks: "The  
 dead—  
 The dead don't only bark for Tammy Younger  
 To sate their hunger!"

John Wharf rose up. He opens the Book for  
 gloss  
 And text. His eyes gleam out; his jaw goes  
 set.  
 Under his pallor burns a purpling fret  
 Of blood in double boss

High on the cheek-bone. Tongues buzz:

“Scarlet—see—a cross!”

*“He that is without sin among you, let*

*Him cast the first stone”*—“Aye, jest leave me  
cast it!

Now watch ’er blast it!”

*Crash!* the great Bible skirls in air, lopsiding  
Thud on the treadway. Peter’s head sticks in  
The window. “Make that stone your text fer  
sin,

Ye crimpin’, Lord-abidin’  
Preach-monger!” Peter grabs the sash; he  
bursts the side in  
And clambers over tinkling glass. A din  
Of screaming turns the church aisle to a bull-  
pit.

Pete storms the pulpit

Brute-bellowing.—The bull-roar lulls and  
quavers.

The sudden tumult hushes sudden—tense.

Quiet thoughts are armored against turbulence.

Before strong love, lust wavers.—

“Peter, the saving hand of Christ holds not a  
slaver’s

Whip, but a flower—a gray flower. See!”

Pete’s sense

Clouds. “So, by God, you’ll try *her* tricks, is  
that it?

Yon witch is at it

“Agin! The Devil grab her. Thar she sits

In meetin’. Be you God-folks goin’ t’ allow

A sluttin’ witch here?” Zorab Coit stands now

In pew. His little slits

Of eyes blaze large. “John Wharf, have you  
clean lost your wits,

Or aire ye *both* blood-guilty o’ my dead sow?

If not, then what in God’s House doos this  
mean?”

“Her soul is clean.”

"Thar's one jest way to clean a witch: that's  
hang 'er!"

"Her soul is clean as mine. If ye doom her,  
Then first ye'll hang John Wharf, her minister."

"The shillin' minx! I'd slang 'er  
Up high as mast'ead." Peter roused new cries  
in clangor.

John raised the Bible high.—"The Book!  
Don't stir!"

All eyed him. (Judy crept. None saw her  
thread  
The gloom. She fled.)

"The Book saith: *"Heaven and earth shall  
pass away*

*But My words shall not pass."*—Hear them in  
awe:

*Love one another!* That is all the law

And prophets. Love is the Way  
Of Christ. This baited child hath chosen to  
obey

*His law, and will ye cast her forth?"*—A flaw

Of pelt drops pattered the roof, and clang of  
thunder

Startled their wonder:

"The witch! Where's Judy Rhines?" "Haw-  
haw!" burst Peter,

"Ye heerd that gong she answered. She's gone  
off

By lightnin' coach to hitch up fer John Wharf  
Housekeepin', whar he'll meet 'er

On Dogtown Common. Axe John if makin'  
love ain't sweeter

Nor makin' sarmons!"—Zorab hacked loud  
cough:

"Tomorrer, Master John, we'll try your case.  
God send ye grace!"

## XII

Judy fled home. The brassy noon turned night.  
Deep in the charnel sky the livid worms  
Of lightning writhed and flicked. They coiled  
    in squirms  
    Of crawling phosphor light  
Swarming the day's cadaver. In her panting  
    flight  
She smelt the heavy sea-brine, hot with sperms  
Of balsam. Faintly came, far off, the roar  
    Of throbbing shore.



Judy sped on. The blackening woodpath swallowed  
Her steps. Like frightened child, groping to bed  
In dark with candle out, voiceless she fled  
Her fears. Behind her followed  
Their voices singing "*scenes of horror and of dread.*"  
The pent dark boomed—it burst! She fell.  
She wallowed  
In rushing slime. She rose. Her clothing hung  
Soggy. It clung.

Her pained side fluttered hot, but chilling  
shackles  
Cramped her faint limbs. The blinding roar  
still surged.—  
It lulled.—It lifted.—Lonely rocks emerged  
Around her. Whirling grackles  
Rose screaming on the coppery clouds, and  
honking cackles  
Of wild geese drifted down. A fox cub verged

Her trail, and blinked. His soaked brush  
draggled behind.

Meekly he whined

Where Judy patted him. But on again  
She fled. At last the peak of Tammy's gable  
Quickened her climbing. Hardly she was able  
To push the swollen door open. Then  
She drabbled in, dripping the boards. "Ha!  
Wondered when  
Ye'd turn up home.—Watch thar! Don't souse  
the table.  
Ye're soaked. Whar ben? Som'ers to fetch us  
eatin'?"

"No, Aunt: to meetin'."

"Meetin'! Not 'Squam ways? Not to Zorab's  
diggin'?  
Not that John Wharf—his preachin' hole?  
Not *him*!  
Judy, speak up!" She nodded. "No! I'll  
vim!

I wouldn't a-stuck a pig in  
 That sty—an' *you*, my own born niece, now *you*  
 go priggin'  
 Thar! Now I'm done with ye! You kin go  
 swim  
 Your lone at Owl's Head, or down Kennebec,  
 Aye, drown'd your neck

"Alone, fer all o' me! Ye're drown'd, half,  
 A'ready. Sarves ye right.—Here, what y' want  
 With them rug rav'lin's? Have 'em? No, ye  
 can't,  
 No! Hang 'em on that gaff  
 Agin. And what had Min'ster John—jest leave  
 me laugh!  
 Had John ter preach?" "He spoke up for me,  
 Aunt."  
 "So *you* was his text!" "O Aunt, he spoke for  
*me!*  
 If it should be

“That they would punish John Wharf, jest  
for sakes

O’ me, and mebbe reave away his living’  
And ban him too.” “Aha! That *would* be  
givin’

Tit for old tat. The cakes  
Would burn right-side for onct!” “The only  
way it takes  
To clean a witch, they said, is hang her.”  
“Grievin’

Christ’ans! Who said that? Old Zorobabel!  
I jest could tell

“His tone o’ voice.—Wall, leave ’em try it.—  
Hang!

They’d need ter hang him, too,—John Wharf,  
if he

Spoke up fer you.” “Oh, do ye think ’t would  
be?

*He* said that, too!”—A pang  
Of speechless love struck Judy white.—“You  
leave him gang

His own gait. Likes o' him an' you don't gee.  
If they could git *you* riddance, they'd forgive  
John—better believe!

“And John himself 'ud axe grace. He'd deal  
ruther

Speak up fer you at fun'ral than at meetin'.  
Oh! don't I know 'em all—the Lord's flock!  
Bleatin'

Lambs!—Leaver a black sheep smother  
Chokin', *they* would, than rub their white-  
washed wool 'gin t'other.”

Tam paused. In anger her tartness drove the  
sweet in;

But now she crooned: “Leave *me* for *them*!  
How could ye,  
Judy,—my Judy?”

Tam yearned with trembling fingers to caress  
The gleaming hair, but Judy silently  
Stole to the doorway.—“I've forgot,” said she,  
“But thar I'll remember.”—“Yes?”

Remember what?—whar?" "Over yonder."

"Change your dress

'Fore ye go out. Ye're sopped."—"The rowan  
tree.

I'll find it in the ferns." "Come back. It's  
drippy

Yet." "Aye, 't is slippy,

"But I won't slip, and I'll be back afore

Ye guess, mayhap—like Granny." "What's  
them things

Ye're sayin'? Talk loud." "How good a tree-  
toad sings

After it's over!" "Ye've tore

Your skirt—there's ravels danglin'." Tam's  
eyes could not pore

Where Judy looped the long rug ravellings

And hid them.—"Tell him, Aunt, the rowan  
tree,

It's prayin'!—He

“Larned it to pray.—How slippy ’t is!” “Here,  
Jude,  
Come back!” But she was gone from Tammy  
—quite  
Gone from old Tam. She crossed the foot-  
bridge, light  
Of step, but solitude  
Weighed on her heart. She sobbed. The tree-  
toads trilled. She viewed  
The rowan tree—the berries bleeding bright.  
She climbed. She slipped. Bark fell.—She  
choked.—It hung.  
The tree-toads sung.

### XIII

"Tam! Tammy Younger! Tam! Where's  
Judy?" "Who

Be you, darkin' my doors'll?" "They'd never  
have done, down

There at the church, and now it's after sun-  
down.

Where's Judy?" "That'll do  
Fer axin', Master Wharf. Now you kin *tell* me  
—you!

Whar's Judy?" "Tam!" "Come, 'fore your  
weights all run down,

Strike time, and tell." "I don't know, Tam.  
Did she—?

The rowan tree—?"



"Aye, them's her words. 'Tell him it's prayin','  
she said,

'He larned it to pray.'—To think I never  
guesst

Her *him* was *you!*" "The rowan tree!" He  
presst

His closed eyes. " 'They're so red—  
The berries!'—That's what I heard her sobbing,  
when I fled

Those devils, to find her. Lord! dear God!"  
—"Ye'd best

Call God. He likes when dead folks—"  
"Don't! Don't say—"

John fled away.

The footbridge creaked and swung. He felt the  
path

Downward with slipping feet. Red dusk was  
still.

Faintly a barking mocked the tree-toad's trill.—

“O, tell it not in Gath—  
My love! my love!”—The forest dripped with  
ghostly aftermath  
Of tempest. Ghostly called the whippoorwill.  
Dim cardinal flowers flecked the pool with  
blood.

He heard the thud

Of partridge wings. He stood in crinkled fern.  
On twilit branches rowan berries clung  
Red-pale,—red-dark a drooping shadow hung.

He knelt. He did not turn  
His eyes away, for round it now began to yearn  
A yellow-golden light. It built. It flung  
A budding whiteness forth—as petals, first  
In April, burst

Their gummy shards to let the crocus blow.  
It bloomed—a bodied glory. Its glory threw  
Forth slender limbs and glimmering hair. It  
grew

In beauty, till the glow

Of Judy's eyes shone down, and Judy's voice  
called: "So

Ye've come, my love, my Lord! Dear Christ—  
't is you!"

John rose.—He cried aloud through quivering  
vines:

"Dear love! O Judy Rhines!"

---

In old Cape Ann, near Gloucester by the sea,  
The summer pilgrim climbs the Dogtown track.  
By slender-falling water he rests his pack  
Under a glimmering tree.

He smells faint fragrance there. He watches a  
wild bee

Sipping a small gray flower. It stores its sack  
With honey dew for dark of thirst and fasting—  
Life Everlasting.

## NOTE

From a little volume, by Charles E. Mann, entitled "In the Heart of Cape Ann" (Gloucester, Mass., the Procter Bros. Co.), the curious reader may learn many strange, half-forgotten facts concerning the old Puritan life of that region. Among its singular New England characters, certain authentic and legendary figures have entered into the theme of this poem.

P. M-K.

Miami University,  
Oxford, Ohio.  
March, 1921.

















